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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the Alulbayt Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Combating premarital sex and teenage pregnancies through the idea of rights to oneself

Introduction

1. The fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women aims to review the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration, which focuses on women's empowerment, equality, dignity and ultimately, developing the full potential of girls and women of all ages. In the light of these terms, the Alulbayt Foundation's research department, the Centre for Islamic Shi'a Studies (CISS), would like to propose a specific review of paragraph 30 of the Beijing Declaration. Paragraph 30 states that Governments are to "ensure equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and health care and enhance women's sexual and reproductive health as well as education". Although the Beijing Declaration emphasizes the rights and advancement of women, which is commendable, we believe that it lacks a deliberation on respecting one's body parts. Empowerment must be balanced with the ability to refuse and deny, particularly when it comes to sexual relationships and young women.

Premarital sex and teenage pregnancies

2. The focus of our statement is the ability of the Beijing Declaration to tackle premarital sex and teenage pregnancies. In our research, we have found two important paragraphs from the World Youth Report 2005[1] that illustrate the sexual problems young people are going through:

(a) Paragraph 60 states:

> Young people worldwide are reaching puberty at earlier ages and marrying later. Premarital sex is becoming more widespread. Despite a trend towards later marriage in much of the world, millions of girls are still expected to marry and begin childbearing in their teens, often before they are ready to do so. Data for the late 1990s show that among young women who were sexually active by age 20, only 51 per cent in Africa and 45 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean initiated sexual activity prior to marriage. By contrast, the corresponding proportion for males was 90 per cent in Africa and 95 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in many developed countries, most men and women initiate sexual activity prior to marriage;

(b) Paragraph 61 states:

> In both developed and developing countries, many who become sexually active at a young age do not know how to protect themselves during sexual activity. Young women are often unable to negotiate condom use with male partners and may fear violence if they try to do so. One third of new cases of curable sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) each year — more than 100 million — are among women and men below age 25. Having an untreated STD significantly increases the risk of HIV infection.

[1] A/60/61-E/2005/7.

3. What we find from the above research is the trend towards premarital sex and the pressure this puts on a young woman's belief in and expression of her own dignity in front of a partner. What is worse is the difficulty that a female teenager goes through if she becomes pregnant at such a tender age. Her youth has been robbed and although any struggle in life may bring maturity to a person, one would hope that maturity would come through conscious choice, reasoning and direction. It is precisely these qualities, which exemplify restraint, which we feel must be emphasized in the declaration.

A solution

4. We would like to propose the concept of "rights to oneself" which is based on the philosophy of Zayn Al-'Ābidīn (the 4th Shi'a Imam and grandson of Prophet Muhammad). He said:

> The greatest of God's rights against you is the right which He has made incumbent upon you for Himself and which is the root of all rights, then those which He has made incumbent upon you in yourself, from your crown to your foot, in keeping with the diversity of your organs. He has given your tongue a right against you, your hearing a right against you, your sight a right against you, your hand a right against you, your leg a right against you, your stomach a right against you, and your private part a right against you. These are the seven organs through which acts take place.

And in talking about the private part, he said: "The right of your private part is that you protect it from fornication and guard it against being looked upon."[2]

5. The deeper meaning behind the above is to foster greater responsibility in human beings to be aware of actions they commit against themselves and each other. However, this can only be done when individuals realize that their natural biological tools are owed duties and these duties stem from respecting the way in which these tools are used. In order to combat the problem of premarital sex and teenage pregnancies, the Centre for Islamic Shi'a Studies of the Alulbayt Foundation proposes to:

(a) Include the idea of "rights to oneself" within the Beijing Declaration;

(b) Practically incorporate the idea of "rights to oneself" within sex and health education of young women in schools and community centres;

(c) Promote classes that teach both young women and men about personal awareness of one's natural biological tools.

6. The Alulbayt Foundation would be happy to offer its services in helping to construct a model for this and is already committed to doing so by promoting this kind of personal awareness among male and female youths in its clinics in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in the Middle East, through its international branches.

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[2] Chittick, W., *Al-Saheefa Al-Sajjadiyyah* (The Psalms of Islam), Ansariyan Publications.